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ABSTRACT

Twelve women who reentered graduate study/career pursuits were studied to determine their perceptions of self and world, and their relationship to the women's movement of the 1960s. The women were in their 30s, 40s, and 50s and pursued graduate school/career pursuits during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Self-worth achieved by the successful career women was experienced in three ways: an income allowing them to have financial self-reliance; recognition of their work and valuing themselves as professional women; and good work with commensurate high income. Independent thought, the invariant structure of self, was developed by these 12 women throughout adulthood and was the stimulus for perceiving the world as a place to establish their individuality, which was expressed in a successful educational/career pursuit with or without their husband's approval or support. The women's movement, the invariant structure of world, provided them the incentive to implement their autonomous selves successfully in graduate study/careers. Consideration is given to: life styles reflected in the marriages of six of the women; a comparison of influences and outcomes affecting women in their 30s, 40s, and 50s; and the women's movement and societal stages in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. (SW)

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW? A FOLLOW UP CASE STUDY OF TWELVE RETURNING GRADUATE WOMEN FROM THE 1960s-80s: THEIR HOPES, EXPECTATIONS, AND REALIZATIONS

Katherine Mastrocola, Ph.D.

This is a presentation of reentry graduate women in their thirties, forties, and fifties who pursued graduate study/career pursuits during the sixties, seventies, and eighties. The discussion includes their perceptions on the levels of self and world, and their relationship to the women's movement of the sixties.

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW? A FOLLOW UP CASE STUDY OF TWELVE RETURNING GRADUATE WOMEN FROM THE 1960s-80s: THEIR HOPES, EXPECTATIONS, AND REALIZATIONS

Introduction

According to the literature, women who have reentered graduate study in the last three decades have been capable, intelligent, determined people with a dedication to themselves, and their educational pursuits. These women have persevered despite seemingly overwhelming obstacles to attain greater self-worth and self-fulfillment. This was evidenced in each of the studies to date.

Although much has been written about the return of women to college campuses, little research has been undertaken to reveal how these reentry graduate women have fared in their experiences following graduation.

The unprecedented events of the sixties signalled for women, particularly, that the time had come for establishing social equality for women with men in the world. A study of a group of twelve reentry graduate women was undertaken to examine the outcomes of their pursuits in the eighties. Most of the twelve subjects (ten) earned graduate degrees during the seventies, the decade which provided a time for stocktaking in the aftermath of the turbulent decade of the sixties.

It was during the decade of the seventies, when increasing numbers of capable, determined women found their way to university campuses to enter the direct pathway to fulfilling their life ambitions. The institutions of higher learning found they, too, experi-

enced an unprecedented phenomenon--that of women approaching the midpoint of life arriving at the university to reenter graduate study.

The study revealed the way in which these reentry graduate women effected changes in their lives through graduate study in order to accomplish their mission and to enter a professional career.

In this presentation, we will discuss the findings in two areas. First, the area of the subjects' development and achievement of their life projects; and secondly, the impact of the women's movement on a world level as experienced by these reentry graduate women during the decades of the sixties, seventies, and eighties.

Discussion of the Findings on the Level of Self-World

What comprised the essence of self for all twelve modern women who chose to reenter graduate study was the basis of independent thought developed by early adolescence through the influence of the peer-group. Independent thought held as the invariant structure of self in the lives of these modern women who chose to establish successful careers regardless of the obstacles before them. It mattered not if their parents were highly educated, or successful persons, or whether mother or father was the dominant parent, or whether the adolescent admired her parents, or wanted to please them. Although, the findings revealed that all subjects essentially wanted to please their parents. Also, it did not matter whether the subjects felt lonely in adolescence and/or felt a sense of separateness from others, or whether their parents were critical of them during adolescence.

The findings of the given research both agree and disagree with a comparative survey study by Lipman-Blumen (1972). Lipman-Blumen found that daughters who perceived their mothers as dissatisfied with the role of homemaker tended to adopt a contemporary ideology in their own lives. This finding of Lipman-Blumen is upheld in the present research. Lipman-Blumen found that when mothers were satisfied as homemakers, their daughters adopted a traditional ideology of the female role. This finding was contravened in the present research, for these twelve women who established successful careers adopted a contemporary ideology, while having mothers who were perceived as satisfied with their traditional role as homemakers.

Also, Lipman-Blumen found that when a father was critical of his daughter, the daughter then opted for the traditional view of the female role. The present research findings, however, revealed that the female who experienced a father's criticalness toward her adopted, instead, a contemporary ideology. In the Lipman-Blumen study it was revealed that when a mother was critical of her daughter, the daughter adopted the contemporary ideology. Similarly, in the present research, it was found that when a mother was critical with her daughter, the daughter mainly adopted a contemporary ideology; or if she adopted a traditional ideology, she later transformed her ideology to a contemporary one in marriage.

Further, Lipman-Blumen found that women who adopted a contemporary ideology were reared in families in which neither parent was dominant. And in families whose fathers were dominant in the marriage, daughters tended to develop the traditional concept of the female role. The present research findings indicated that it mattered not which parent was the

more dominant in the marriage. All twelve women eventually established a contemporary ideology in or outside of marriage.

Independent thought, the invariant structure of self, developed by these twelve women thoughout adulthood was the stumulus to their perceiving the world as a place to establish their individuality which was expressed in a successful educational/career pursuit with or without their husband's approval or support. The women's movement, the invariant structure of world, provided for these modern women the incentive to implement their autonomous selves successfully in graduate study/career pursuits. Inexorably, these women pursued a place for themselves in the world alongside successful men, in a professional career. Their autonomy served as the vehicle for establishing and expressing their individuality. These twelve women then achieved a sense of worth through their graduate study/career realizations as individuals.

The present study indicated that the self-worth achieved by these successful career women was experienced in three ways: 1) as money, affording them an income on a level commensurate with a life of financial self-reliance; 2) as recognition of their work, valuing themselves as professional women with a specialty area of expertise; and 3) good work with commensurate high income. None is dissatisfied as a professional woman in terms of her achievement. Three subjects had earned an MBA in business, and achieved professional work on the level of corporate management. Two subjects had earned an MBA and a Ph.D., and achieved a level of professional work in corporate management and in the academic setting. Four subjects had earned a Ph.D., each achieving the level of a pro-

fessional in the academic area. One subject had earned a doctoral degree in the health care field, achieving professional work in research and management. One subject had earned two Ph.D.s, achieving the level of professional in the field of science. The last subject earned an M.D. and a Ph.D.

Six women who pursued a reentry graduate program/career project, having originally adopted a contemporary ideology, found that the contemporary ideology within the marriage enhanced their successful careers. One woman had established a contemporary ideology in marriage with traditional concerns, placing the children before her educational/career pursuit. She found that her accepted philosophy lent support to her project. She recognized the children's self-growth while she herself was achieving success, in addition to her husband's support and vicarious enjoyment of her successful career. Two women initiated a reentry graduate program/career project within a traditional marriage, but found that as the career unfolded, the traditional marriage then evolved into a contemporary one for both spouses, which they felt enhanced the marriage as well. The three women who had adopted a traditional ideology as the foundation of their marriage met with marital dissolution in these ways: 1) divorce ended the marriage. This woman had adopted a contemporary ideology during her doctoral work, then later remarried when she became established in a new and successful career. 2) Divorce ended the marriage of a second woman who eventually adopted the contemporary life style in the marriage and has remained unmarried to the present time. 3) Separation from the spouse occurred when the third woman adopted a contemporary ideology. She has come to accept her status, and is continuing in a very successful career.

The findings revealed three main life styles which were reflected in the marriages of these women: 1) contemporary in which the career was viewed as most important by both spouses; 2) traditional-contemporary in which the husband's career was viewed as most important by both spouses initially, but was transformed to a contemporary ideology by the woman's desire to establish a career in the world; 3) contemporary with traditional concerns, in which the children are placed before the careers of each spouse.

The women who originally adopted the contemporary ideology in adolescence identified mainly with their peer-group. But the women who in adolescence adopted a traditional ideology and later transformed their ideology into a contemporary one in adulthood, had identified with the parent's role-model ideology.

Comparing the findings of this research with the Lipman-Blumen study (1972), the twelve reentry graduate women attained achievement satisfaction in their marriages in one of three different modes: 1) vicarious, in which the woman in early marriage achieved satisfaction through the husband's successful career, then achieved satisfaction by establishing her own successful career which was balanced with her husband's career success; 2) balanced, by which the woman fulfilled achievement satisfaction in a contemporary marriage by establishing her career as equal to her husband's career success; 3) direct, whereby the woman realized achievement satisfaction primarily through her own accomplishments, in addition to her husband's successful career.

Nine of the twelve women attained achievement satisfaction directly in contemporary marriages, four of which had been transformed from

traditional marriages. Seven of the twelve women had established contemporary marriages; three of these attained a balanced mode of achievement satisfaction with their husbands. Five women who originally established traditional marriages which they later transformed into contemporary ones, lived the direct mode of achievement satisfaction they had always sought.

The women's movement significantly created a sense of equality for these women with men in the world. Whether a contemporary or traditional ideology was adopted early in the marriage, the women's acceptance of equality with men became established as the cornerstone of indpendent thought in adolescence.

As revealed in the findings, the women in the younger age group mainly adopted the contemporary ideology in adolescence, and understood themselves as being equal to men in the world, and then entered careers and marriages with the intention of establishing equality in their lives.

The older women identifed with a more traditional female role in adolescence, and then adopted a contemporary ideology in adulthood. They also accepted a sense of equality with men in their adult lives, which shaped their future goal of attaining success in a professional career through graduate study.

The women's movement had effected these women specifically in two different ways: 1) actively interested; or, 2) not actively interested. The women who in 1984 were in their thirties, happily married, with successful careers, were mainly not actively interested in the women's movement. These women understood the women's movement as having been effective in its accomplished aims, although one woman understood the movement as grandstanding, essentially contributing little to women's equality.

These women in their thirties, discerned the women's movement as important to women. It formed a rationale for equality with men, and was worthwhile because it effectively influenced the men as well.

The women who were in their forties had no active interest in the women's movement, and believed this movement was essentially ineffective due to the method which was pursued to effect equality with men. Those women who acknowledged that the women's movement was effective in bringing about some changes in the inequality between men and women, took no active interest in it. Women in their forties felt no direct help from the women's movement except for an awareness of inequality; while one woman believed the movement was ridiculous due to the established stand of feminists in the eyes of the world. They acknowledged the need for women to be treated equal to men on the job, but believed they had worked out solutions successfully on an individual basis.

The women in their fifties were actively interested in the women's movement. They followed the movement with active interest in adulthood, and felt inspired to personally achieve, while observing the success of what appeared to be the proclaimed equality for women with men on the world level. These women transformed their lives congruent with the perceived success of the women's movement which gave these women hope as they established equality with men in their personal lives.

The women who were influenced by the women's movement in adulthood, and are in their fifties, had mainly identified in adolescence with their mother's traditional ideology. Once an active interest in the movement took hold permitting a contemporary ideology to emerge, the women's marriages either failed or became revitalized. The women who found

the women's movement essentially ineffective, and are in their forties, had identified mainly with their fathers in adolescence and with their peer-group ideology. They were readily able to survive any changes which successful careers brought to their marriages. Only one marriage ended.

The women who in adolescence identified with a contemporary ideology, understood the women's movement as effective in establishing equality for women. They had mainly identified with a peer-group ideology, while they discerned the father's ideology as creating success in the world. These women all happily married and have also established successful careers.

In 1984, the modern woman has developed independent thought in adulthood which became the basis for her desire to achieve success in the world, establishing equality with men, in and outside of marriage, through the successful implementation of the autonomous self within a reentry graduate program/career pursuit. Success was attained, marriages were revitalized and transformed, or the marriages ended. But overall, the modern reentry graduate woman is establishing a sense of self-worth in an autonomous life style as wife and mother coupled with a rewarding professional career.

Discussion of the Findings on the Societal Level

From the standpoint of the three decades, the sixties, seventies, and eighties, the women's movement, according to the findings of the present study evolved through three stages.

The sixties, the first stage, ushered in an awakening for women. The complacency about "woman's place," and the responsibilities of child-rearing to the exclusion of career opportunities, was suddenly shattered

as women began to ask questions about their responsibilities to themselves as well as to others. The women's movement picked up momentum with the feminine rhetoric and it became evident that a drastic and fundamental change in the attitudes of women in this society was about to take place as women and men addressed the issue of equality and freedom for women to achieve and develop themselves in today's world.

The seventies, the second stage, became a serious time of stock-taking for women. Women were now able to reconcile their desire to take advantage of newly established freedom in the roles of wife and mother with their need to satisfy personal achievement. They were now convinced it was not only possible but a given right which was not to be denied those women who chose to attain their goal. Mothers and fathers reared their daughters to move forward, accepting their autonomous selves and to take advantage of opportunities now available to achieve self-fulfillment.

Now at the midpoint of the eighties, the third stage, it is apparent that the women's movement has brought both men and women to a new acceptance of freedom for women in this society. There are at least three areas that warrant consideration.

First, women have accepted without question their right to pursue an education at any point in their self-development, and to acquire a professional career. It is most apparent in the younger women who are presently deliberating over the type of work they will enter, including many fields which have been traditionally considered male professions until this recent decade.

Secondly, and even more momentous and significant is that men, especially husbands, have generally accepted that women have the freedom and right to achieve and fulfill their desires in the world equally with men. Again, it is most apparent among the young men and women who have been schooled in a new ideology in which the tenets of the women's movement have been laid down and are accepted with little question. As a result, mothers have told their children, particularly their daughters, that opportunity and equality are to be accorded all citizens in this society, whether male or female. Daughters in the last two decades witnessed this acceptance as mothers began leaving the home to pursue educational and career opportunities. In addition, the information explosion and the media in recent years have reiterated and intensified the understanding that education is for all who seek it. Also, that new opportunities and freedom are available and to be taken for granted by those women who possess the ability and determination to achieve them.

Thirdly, the economic climate, and the conservative viewpoint which was ushered in during the late seventies have made it justifiable for mothers to work and fathers to more readily accept this new role for their wives, which is true for those in the older population, middle-aged, and newly married couples. Women have experienced the need to help out financially to meet expenses in an economy where industries which were once synonomous with stability and economic security are now faced with dissolution and cutbacks in employment. It is a reality that independent women with or without families must accept.

Again, the conservative view which took hold in the seventies is more prevalent among the youth of the nation. Young, married couples

today are weighing options which will assure the most secure futures for their families. Both husbands and wives are working out life plans together which will provide security and independence, and that unquestionably might include the wife's seeking a career of her own.

The present research revealed that women are capable and dedicated to assume professional careers alongside their male counterparts in this society. Men are also experiencing this development and are being confronted with accepting it as well. Another significant aspect emerging is that women today are seeking professional careers with mobility rather than merely a job with a paycheck.

Overall, what characterizes the women's movement through the last three decades was reflected in the age groups of the subjects in their thirties, forties, and fifties. Subjects who were in the youngest group accepted the women's movement as a given--an event that occurred because it is accepted that women are and should be on an equal basis with men. Their male contemporaries agree with this understanding. For women in today's society who are in their thirties, success in a professional career is just a matter of going "out there" and attaining one's goals as a woman.

The subjects who were in their forties were closer to the women's movement at its inception and although they have taken for granted the concept that women are equal in opportunity with men, or should be, (they too have experienced discrimination), they can recall either first-hand or written accounts in the media of some of the tactics exhibited by feminists to move their "cause" along. In retrospect, these tactics sometimes seemed outlandish as an over-reaction by women who became

caught up in resisting perceived unjust practices of our traditional norms.

The subjects who reached adulthood early in this three-decade period, now in their fifties, had experienced discrimination on a more significant level in their young adult lives, and were aware that women were not being accorded equal opportunities with men in the world. These women deeply questioned this "place" for women and struggled to achieve their aims despite resistance both in the marriage setting and on the world level. They understood the women's movement as the vehicle for allowing them to move ahead toward career success through graduate study. The women in their fifties, in this research, particularly, knew they were competent and capable as professional women. They had demonstrated their ability along educational lines and were determined to achieve self-worth in autonomous ways. They were sometimes met with irreconcilable differences in marriage. But they persevered and succeeded.

In summary, as we assess the present decade, it is most apparent that women have made great changes in the way they think, and feel, and have determined to continue on new paths that lead to self-fulfillment and economic stability.

Reentry graduate women have led the way by accomplishing their goals through their autonomous development of independent thought, exceptional capabilities, and determination. There is no other alternative; they have prepared the way for others to follow. The economic and political climates, both on the national and international scales, as well as technological advancements have made the world a smaller place; one that is ever more accessible to new discovery and global concerns.

It will require the combined progress and talents of all men and women to prepare to meet the challenges that await us in the twenty-first century.